

RIP: Science on TV

By Dr. M.  May 30, 2012

Remember when MTV actually aired music?

Remember when you could learn something from the Learning Channel? Got actual history on the History Channel? Or actually make a real discovery about something other than guns or auctions on Discovery Channel? Remember when nature was cool enough no sensationalism was needed?

And remember when Animal Planet actually showed programs about real animals? Animal Planet has decided to run a *Monster Week*, "a weeklong network programming stunt". **Those are their words, not mine.** The "crescendo", again their words, is a special titled *Mermaids: The Body Found*. And o' is it special and one hell of a stunt.

I will admit right here I've not seen it. Much like I won't visit the Creation Museum, I won't watch this bullshit. Both could give me me some laughs but ultimately would kill off what little soul I have left. For another 5-10 minutes I still have faith in humanity, I choose not to shorten that.

The story

Once upon a time, there lived a little mermaid in an underwater kingdom. She ventured to surface, longing to communicate with people on land... This is a fairytale told and retold to children everywhere; it's a beloved story about a legendary creature that's described in the mythologies of nearly every human culture in history. People across all continents who've had no communications with other societies have described the same half-man, half-fish anomaly - they've spoken about the same mythic animal. What if there's a kernel of truth that lives beneath the legend of the mythic mermaid? Now, in *MERMAIDS: THE BODY FOUND*...

Animal Planet brings viewers into the world where the legend is real. The film blends real-life events and phenomena with the story of two scientists who testify they found the remains of a never-before-identified sea creature. Spectacular CGI animates a world where mermaids really do swim below the water's surface, cooperatively hunt with dolphins and may continue to survive in an intricate society where they stay hidden in fear of their Earth-bound relatives...

MERMAIDS: THE BODY FOUND is a story about evolutionary possibility grounded in a radical scientific theory - the Aquatic Ape Theory, which claims that humans had an aquatic stage in our evolutionary past. While coastal flooding millions of years ago turned some of our ancestors inland, is it possible that one group of our ancestors didn't retreat from water but rather went in deeper? Could they have ventured farther into sea out of necessity and to find food? The Aquatic Ape Theory makes it possible to believe that while we evolved into terrestrial humans, our aquatic relatives turned into something strangely similar to the fabled mermaid.

MERMAIDS: THE BODY FOUND makes a strong case for the existence of the mermaid, a creature with a surprisingly human evolutionary history, whose ancestral branch spills off from a shared human root. The film is science fiction, using science as a springboard into imagination and centering the story on [two] real-world events.

At the website this text is preceded with

Editor's Note: This two-hour special is science fiction based on some real events and scientific theory.

All this is so bad that Snopes.com **actually has entry for this**. Have I used the word appalled yet? A friend of DSN a fellow for Media and Democracy and a major university stated this in email that drew my attention to this farce

It was one of the most ridiculously misleading pieces of programming I've ever seen on any Discovery-affiliated channel. It was a mockumentary (although this wasn't disclosed until the very end of the credits) explaining the "aquatic ape theory" using interviews with fake "maritime scientists," CGI and photoshopped historical records. I know some of the programming on these channels is pretty bad, but this seemed to bring things to a whole new level.

So I would like to respond with a **DSN Editor's Note**

DSN Editor's Note: This two-hour special is fiction based on no real world events and a scientific hypothesis with no evidence and long ago discounted (and laughed at) by real scientists. DSN is appalled that Animal Planet

1. cannot pick at least one of the millions of real organisms on this planet as the subject of a special (if you need some help just ask us here at DSN or any two year old),

2. heralding a phase where biodiversity of life on earth is not enough and we need to make animals up to entertain. (Do Animal Planet producers ever interact with the real public or do they make them up too? Every time I talk about any organism with public, from children to adults, in classrooms, bars, or aquariums, they are fascinated. When did this become hard?)

3. put forth fiction as fact on a channel people expect fact from. (even more appalling is waiting until the credits to admit this is a mockumentary).

4. putting any stock into the Aquatic Ape Hypothesis **indeed it is not even science but pseudoscience**.

5. and having actors play scientists spout off made up shit in a mockumentary that you do not announce to the end (way to denigrate scientists and life we've dedicated ourselves to. I guess that big fancy Ph.D I have, all those years of research, and reading of actual scientific literature was f'n pointless. I can just take an acting class online and make shit up).

DSN demands an apology from Animal Planet for selling fiction based on fiction off as anything but fiction on channel that should be celebrating the diversity of actual life.

UPDATE:

And for those who don't think any damage was done

First a celebrity and her sisters (for reasons I still don't understand), tweet to there followers. One of the Kardashians alone as almost 15,000,000 followers. The is a huge ring of influence and it's clear not all of them realized that the mermaid story was a mockumentary.



Of course, throughout Twitter the ramifications were seen of Animal Planet not clearly states this **WAS NOT REAL**.



Even worse is children taken in by this, who may not have developed the filters to distinguish between science and pseudoscience



Luckily, some people realized it was a fake. However, how many stopped watching before the announcement?



Apparently some missed the brief message.

Indeed! Shame on you for that fake fucking mermaid bullshit!